

## Ernst Krieck

*Volker Sellin, 2012*

The 19<sup>th</sup> of March 2012 marked the sixty-fifth anniversary of the death of the educator Ernst Krieck. The place of his passing was conditioned by the role he had played as a leading ideologue of the National Socialist regime. Krieck died in the American internment camp Moosburg an der Isar, where he was awaiting the conclusion of his denazification proceedings.

Krieck was born on 6 July 1882 in Vögisheim, today a district of Müllheim/Baden, the son of a master bricklayer.<sup>1</sup> After attending primary school and secondary school in Müllheim, Krieck studied at the Karlsruhe teacher training college from 1898 to 1900. Until 1909 he worked as a sub-teacher in Brötzingen and Ettersbach near Pforzheim, in Pforzheim itself and in Weinheim, and from 1904 in Mannheim. From 1909 to 1924 he was a main teacher in Mannheim. His studies at the teacher training college had not satisfied his scientific interest. Therefore, in addition to his work as an elementary school teacher, he continued his education through self-study. Initially, he studied the philosophy of German idealism and the traditional pedagogy of Herbart. In retrospect, he wrote in 1942 about this phase of his life: “The publishing house Reclam became my first university, since my monthly salary of 66.66 RM was not enough”.<sup>2</sup> In the German Teachers’ Association and in articles for the *Badische Lehrerzeitung*, he simultaneously campaigned for interdenominational primary schools and for facilitating access to higher education for working-class children. Krieck’s extensive reading was reflected in numerous publications. The book “*Persönlichkeit und Kultur*” (Personality and Culture) began in 1910. This was followed in 1917 by “*Die deutsche Staatsidee*”. In 1922, Krieck published “*Philosophie der Erziehung*” (Philosophy of Education) with the Eugen Diederichs publishing house in Jena.

In this book, Krieck unfolded his basic ideas on educational science. He accused the prevailing pedagogy of narrowing the concept of education to the teaching of

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<sup>1</sup> For Krieck’s biography, see the personnel files in the Generallandesarchiv Karlsruhe 235/2244-2246 and in the Heidelberg University Archives PA 1032, 4662-4666, as well as *ibid.* B-3029/18 and Rep. 27 (Quästur) No. 699 f. Photographs of Krieck can be found in Krieck’s estate, no. 10, in the Generallandesarchiv Karlsruhe and under the call number Pos. III 00062 in the picture archive of the Heidelberg University Archive; the most recent biographical sketch on Krieck is the article by Benjamin Ortmeier, Krieck, Ernst, Pädagoge, in: *Badische Biographien, Neue Folge, Band VI*, ed. by Fred Ludwig Sepaintner, Stuttgart 2011, pp. 231-234.

<sup>2</sup> Ernst Krieck, *Erlebter Neuidealismus*, Heidelberg 1942, S. 4 f

children and adolescents in school: “General educational theory has been extended teaching theory”.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, Kriek developed a sociological concept of education and defined education as “a primal function in community life”, as an unreflective, universal social process that takes place unplanned in every community, wherever people communicate with each other, and which consequently continuously shapes the individual until his or her death.<sup>4</sup> Kriek found the succinct formula for this: “All educate all at all times”.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, the task of educational science is to explore the social process of education and its effects, instead of limiting itself to the techniques of imparting skills and knowledge to children and young people. Kriek conceded to teaching in schools or workshops only the function of supporting and supplementing the educational processes that take place spontaneously in society. His core concern was an “autonomous educational science” that did not place itself at the service of arbitrarily formulated educational goals, but left their determination to social development.<sup>6</sup> Kriek distinguished between two ways in which educational goals were formed in society. Basically, each generation tends to reproduce its own way of life and pass it on to the next generation. Kriek called this process the conservative type of education. Next to the conservative type, he placed the revolutionary type of education. This meant a form of education that aimed to change society. Its purpose was the “realisation of something that did not yet exist, of something that was meant to be”.<sup>7</sup> The urge for change stemmed from the emergence of new ideas in society. In accordance with the principles of his autonomous educational science, however, Kriek only gave new ideas a chance of realisation on the condition that they actually prevailed in society and pointed social development in a new direction.

The “*Philosophie der Erziehung*” met with broad approval. By 1930, 6000 copies had been printed. The philosophy faculty of the University of Heidelberg awarded Kriek, who had neither studied at a university nor acquired academic titles, the dignity of an honorary doctor of philosophy for the book in 1923 at the suggestion of the philosopher Ernst Hoffmann. No one foresaw at the time that the pedagogical positions advocated in the book could one day become the starting point for an inhumane ideology. In fact, Kriek refrained from normative positing in his “*Philosophie der Erziehung*”. However, the reference to the revolutionary type of social education would later prove to be a gateway for National Socialist ideas. As Dominic Kaegi recently judged, Kriek’s conception of a “culturally

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<sup>3</sup> Ernst Kriek, *Philosophie der Erziehung*, Jena 1922, pg. 7.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 12.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 47.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 42.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 182.

relativistic idea of education” was “by no means National Socialist in design”, but it proved to be “applicable to National Socialism at all times”.<sup>8</sup> In 1932 Krieck joined the NSDAP and the National Socialist Teachers’ Association, and two years later also the SS, where he rose to the rank of Obersturmbannführer by 1938. At the same time, he worked in the security service of the Reichsführer SS. In November 1933, he completed a manuscript, the title of which was already linked to the book of 1922, but which at the same time expressed his adaptation to the new power relations in Germany: “National Socialist Education, Founded on the Philosophy of Education”. Krieck continued to adhere to the thesis that education “as a spiritual primal function of human life” always takes place spontaneously and without intention in every community.<sup>9</sup> He added, however, that the numerous smaller and larger special communities in Germany were ultimately enclosed by the underlying community of the folkdom. Krieck understood the folkdom as a racially determined characteristic of the Germans, which, however, had to be understood as such. Only when it was understood could it be raised through education into a new, supposedly predetermined form of existence. Formally, this form of education corresponded to the revolutionary type of education defined in 1922. However, while Krieck had left the content and direction of the new ideas completely open and left them to social development, ten years later he declared the National Socialist world view to be the guiding principle of all future education. As the goal of the “education of the people by the folkish state as a whole”, Krieck now referred to the “German nationalisation”.<sup>10</sup> How central this idea was for Krieck’s educational goals is shown by the fact that from 1933 to 1943 he published a magazine entitled “Volk im Werden” (Folk in the Making). Because the present generation of parents had not yet been educated in this spirit and therefore could not spontaneously pass on the values propagated by National Socialism, Krieck now demanded that the next generation take education into their own hands. Accordingly, he recommended that the education of children and young people be transferred to the National Socialist youth organisations.<sup>11</sup> However, as Krieck had already explained in 1932 in the book *Nationalpolitische Erziehung* (National-Political Education), public educational institutions up to university level had to orient their tasks towards the goal of the “folkish-political worldview”.<sup>12</sup> In pursuit of this goal, he called for a racially, folkish and National Socialist-oriented science. Between

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<sup>8</sup> Dominic Kaegi, Philosophie, in: Wolfgang U. Eckart/Volker Sellin/Eike Wolgast (Hg.), *Die Universität Heidelberg im Nationalsozialismus*, Heidelberg 2006, pg. 340.

<sup>9</sup> Ernst Krieck, *Nationalsozialistische Erziehung begründet aus der Philosophie der Erziehung*, 3., unveränderte Auflage, Osterwieck/Berlin 1935, pg. 1.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 3.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 12.

<sup>12</sup> Ernst Krieck, *Nationalpolitische Erziehung*, Leipzig 1932, S. 164.

1936 and 1938, Krieck published a “Folkish-Political Anthropology” in three parts, with which he believed he had laid the foundations for all sciences on the basis of the “National Socialist Revolution”.<sup>13</sup> With this publication at the latest, Krieck joined the group of leading ideologists of the Third Reich. As early as August 1933, he had confidently written in the preface to the 14th edition of “Nationalpolitische Erziehung” that this book had won over whole strata of the educated to the National Socialist movement.

Shortly after the seizure of power, Krieck was given the opportunity to participate in the National Socialist restructuring of the German university. In May 1933 he was appointed to a chair of education at the University of Frankfurt and at the same time to the rector of this university. In 1934, Krieck was appointed to the chair at the University of Heidelberg, which had been held by the philosopher Heinrich Rickert until 1932. The chair was rededicated to philosophy and pedagogy for Krieck. Asked for his opinion, Karl Jaspers had advocated Krieck’s appointment to a chair of education. He had, however, remained silent about his profile as a philosopher.<sup>14</sup> In the summer of 1935, Krieck was appointed head of the National Socialist Lecturers’ Association in the Gau Baden. Two years later he was appointed rector of the University of Heidelberg, succeeding the labour lawyer Wilhelm Groh.<sup>15</sup> The path to the rectorate had led in April 1935 via Krieck’s appointment to the “staff of the university’s leader”, created by Groh and not provided for in the university constitution.<sup>16</sup> As Rector, Krieck sought to imbue the university as comprehensively as possible with the spirit of National Socialism and, in this sense, “to lead it along the path of inner reform, along the path that has as its goal the unity of worldview and science, the penetration and renewal of science from the worldview”.<sup>17</sup> Already in the following year, he resigned from the rectorate, citing his failing health. In the same year, he also resigned from the SS. In 1941, he turned down a call to the University of Strasbourg. On 30 March 1945, American troops occupied the city of Heidelberg. On 6 April, Krieck was arrested in his flat and taken to the Aldingen internment camp near Ludwigsburg. In 1946, he was first transferred to the Garmisch camp, then to the Moosburg camp in Upper Bavaria. He died there on 19 March 1947.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ernst Krieck, *Völkisch-politische Anthropologie*, 1. Teil: Die Wirklichkeit, Leipzig 1936, pg. 13.

<sup>14</sup> Dominic Kaegi, *Philosophie* (wie Anm. 8), pg. 341.

<sup>15</sup> Volker Sellin, *Die Rektorate Andreas, Groh und Krieck 1933–1938*, in: Wolfgang U. Eckart/Volker Sellin/Eike Wolgast (Hg.), *Die Universität Heidelberg* (wie Anm. 8), pg. 20.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 16.

<sup>17</sup> Ernst Krieck, *Führertum und Hochschulreform*, in: *Volk im Werden*. Zeitschrift für Kulturpolitik 5 (1937), pg. 61.

<sup>18</sup> See Volker Sellin, *Politische Säuberung des Lehrkörpers*, in: Peter Meusburger/Thomas Schuch (Hg.), *Wissenschaftsatlas der Universität Heidelberg*, Knittlingen 2011, S. 144 f.; zu dem Gesamtvorgang vgl.

Krieck left behind his wife Maria Eugenie née. Perrin (1875-1953) and a daughter, Ilse Lore (1913-1976).

In 1942 Krieck published what he called a “self-portrayal of his career” under the title “Experienced New Idealism”.<sup>19</sup> The title refers to the philosophical starting point of his thinking at the beginning of the century. At that time, Krieck had tried to gain an approach for a renewal of culture from the philosophy of German idealism. He later abandoned this hope; indeed, as he wrote in 1942, he had in the meantime rejected philosophy itself as an error. The autobiographical sketch reveals that Krieck suffered from the disrespect he received as an elementary school teacher and autodidact from the circles of university scholars.

Krieck was an extraordinarily diligent writer. The bibliography compiled by Eckhard Thomale lists 776 books and essays alone. Most of his books went through several editions. By 1941, some 300,000 copies had been sold, 80,000 of “Nationalpolitische Erziehung” alone. This alone indicates that his National Socialist educational theory gained considerable influence. After the collapse of the Third Reich, Krieck confessed to the American military government: “In my works, worldview and science cannot be separated”.<sup>20</sup>

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auch Volker Sellin, *Die Universität Heidelberg im Jahre 1945*, in: Jürgen C. Heß/Hartmut Lehmann/Volker Sellin (Hg.), Heidelberg 1945, Stuttgart 1996, pg. 91–106.

<sup>19</sup> Ernst Krieck, *Erlebter Neuidealismus* (wie Anm. 2), pg. 7.

<sup>20</sup> Generallandesarchiv Karlsruhe, Krieck estate. No. 7 (1): Supplement to Krieck’s completed questionnaire from the American military government under the title “Die Schriftwerke und Reden”.

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